

VZCZCXYZ0004
OO RUEHWEB

DE RUEHNO #0114/01 0791552
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 201552Z MAR 09
FM USMISSION USNATO
TO RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 2801
INFO RUEHZG/NATO EU COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USEUCOM VAHINGEN GE PRIORITY
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RHMFISS/HQ USCENCOM MACDILL AFB FL PRIORITY
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/JOINT STAFF WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L USNATO 000114

NOFORN
SIPDIS

PASS TO EUR/RPM AND EUR/UMB

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/20/2019
TAGS: [MARR](#) [NATO](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PREL](#) [BO](#)
SUBJECT: RFG: NATO-BELARUS SECURITY AGREEMENT

Classified By: Ambassador Kurt Volker, for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (C/NF) This is a request for guidance. See paragraph 3.

The Issue

12. (C/NF) Although Belarus signed a security of information agreement with NATO many years ago as a member of the Alliance's Partnership for Peace (PfP), the U.S. has blocked the certification of the agreement. Without the certification, the agreement can not come into force, leaving Belarus unable to participate in most PfP courses and activities. We have grown increasingly isolated within the Alliance on this issue, particularly as Minsk has taken some positive steps, such as the release of political prisoners, and as the EU has adopted a more flexible approach in its relations with Belarus. The issue has been raised twice in recent meetings of the NATO Political Committee, with the Chair making clear that he intends to raise it again in the near future. The Czech PermRep, in his EU Presidency role, has approached us directly on this issue several times in recent days, as have the Lithuanians and Latvians. While acknowledging the continuing troubled nature of U.S.-Belarus bilateral relations, including the punitive actions taken against our Embassy, we think that the time is right to take a fresh look at our position on NATO-Belarus relations, particularly as regards the information security agreement.

13. (C/NF) Request for Guidance: We request guidance by April 6, which we believe may be when the issue will next appear on the Political Committee agenda, on whether we can now join consensus to allow the certification of Belarus's security of information agreement.

Background

14. (U) NATO-Belarus relations began in 1992, when Minsk joined the North Atlantic Cooperation Council (the forerunner of today's Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council or EAPC). In 1995 Belarus joined NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP), a program aimed at increasing security and defense cooperation between NATO and Partner countries. As a normal part of the process of joining PfP, Belarus signed a security of information agreement with NATO. These agreements allow for the exchange of classified information between partner nations and the Alliance and are required as a prerequisite for participation in most PfP activities, courses, and exercises. Despite the fact that Belarus signed the

agreement, it has never come into force. The U.S., citing concerns over the human rights situation in Belarus, blocked the NATO Office of Security (NOS) from traveling to Minsk in order to carry out the required certification process. NOS has made clear that this blockage is purely political. It believes that Belarus would meet the technical requirements required for certification. While Belarus tries to engage in the PfP process, submitting an annual Individual Partnership Programme (IPP) and joining the Planning and Review Process (PARP), it can do little without the security agreement.

Arguments For a Change in U.S. Policy

15. (C/NF) During our discussions on the subject, Allies make the following arguments in an effort to persuade us to change our policy:

-- The U.S. position is inconsistent with agreed PfP/EAPC principles, specifically, the principle of inclusivity, meaning that opportunities for political consultation and practical cooperation will be open to all Allies and Partners equally. This principle is enshrined in the Basic Document of the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council, and by blocking certification of the agreement, we block Belarus participation in PfP activities, thus violating this agreed principle.

-- NATO should be consistent in how it treats Partners: While Allies agree that Belarus has a deplorable record on human rights and political freedoms, they also point out that NATO has a policy of engaging countries with similar records in an effort to help transform them over time. In its 2009 report, for example, Freedom House reported that two other Partners -- Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan -- were among the eight countries that received the lowest possible rating on their scale. Belarus ranked in the category just above them. And yet, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have certified security of information agreements with the Alliance while Belarus does not.

-- The Belarus military is exactly who the West should be engaging: Most human rights abuses in Belarus are carried out by the BKGB and the Ministry of the Interior, not the Ministry of Defense and the military. If a change ever does take place in Belarus, the army may play a leading role. NATO would be investing in the future by engaging them now. PfP is heavily focused on practical cooperation with Partner countries' militaries.

-- PfP is Transformative: Many of the courses and activities under the PfP umbrella were designed at the end of the Cold War to help the countries of Eastern Europe transition to democracy. The U.S. position prevents the Alliance from using these transformative tools in its relationship with Belarus. This is a particularly bitter pill for our newer Allies to swallow, since PfP played an important role in helping them make the reforms needed for their NATO membership.

-- We should respond to the positive steps taken by Belarus recently: While clearly not wishing to overstate their argument, Allies note that Belarus has taken several notable steps recently, such as the release of internationally-recognized political prisoners. Allies argue that the positive steps which have been taken by Belarus would probably not have occurred without the more flexible approach which some in the international community, particularly the EU, are already using. In this regard, our EU Allies have made clear that they seek consistency between the NATO and EU approaches to Belarus.

-- Allies have other tools to shape the relationship: There are other, less blunt, methods by which Allies can shape the scope of NATO-Belarus relations. For example, Allies and Belarus on a regular basis jointly develop and agree an Individual Partnership Program. These two-year programs are drawn up from an extensive menu of activities, according to

each country's specific interests and needs.

-- The U.S. policy could complicate NATO transit negotiations: NATO is in the initial stages of negotiating a transit agreement with Belarus as a part of a Northern Line of Communication into Afghanistan. While Belarus has never linked the transit agreement to the issue of security agreement certification, some Allies worry that this might become an issue. On the practical front, Allies have wondered whether we actually could transit ISAF-related materiel across a country with which we have no security arrangement.

-- Don't forget about the Russia angle: While Belarus clearly has many links with Moscow, the relationship is a stormy one. Belarus has often been stubbornly independent. It has, for example, refused to bow to Russian pressure to recognize the independence of the Georgian regions of South Ossetia and Abkhazia. NATO engagement could be used to encourage this independence, showing Minsk that it does have alternatives.

VOLKER